

Historical Scenes *in the Berkshire Hills*

*From Connecticut to Vermont
and Over the Mohawk Trail*



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Pittsfield, Massachusetts



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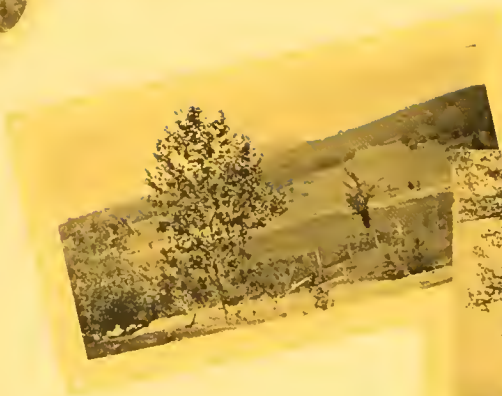
Historical Scenes in the Berkshire Hills

From Connecticut to Vermont
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By
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Compiled by W. S. Weld



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BERKSHIRE County, Massachusetts, the home of the Berkshire Life Insurance Company, has been rightly called the brightest gem in Nature's jewel casket. A charming valley, fifty-one miles in length and about twenty miles broad from Mountain top to Mountain top, hemmed in by the Taghconic ("the forest hills") range on the west, and the Hoosac ("Mountain Rock") range on the east, dotted with seventy beautiful lakes and crossed here and there by forest clad foot hills, it presents a scene of diversified beauty which allures both by its wildness and by its serene quiet. That its first inhabitants, the Mohican tribe of Indians, appreciated its charm is shown in the numerous legends of their life here and in the suggestive names which they handed down to their successors. The waterfalls of the county, Bash Bish and **Wahconah**, were named for two charming Indian maidens;—its river, the Housatonic, means in the Indian tongue "the river beyond the Mountains;" Pontoo-sue lake is the "haunt of the winter deer;" Mount Honwee is translated "Men surpassing all others;" and the streams and hills called Unkamet, Yokon and Konkapot recall the famous chiefs who led their warriors over these hills.

Entering this vale of beauty from the State of Connecticut at the South, we face the splendid dome of Mount Wash-





ington at the right, almost matching in height the towering outlines of Greylock, keeping watch with its snow-crowned head at the northern end of the county. Here the lover of nature will turn aside to visit the falls of Bash Bish and admire the beauty of the scene from the top of the Dome, and will then wend his way to Sky Farm, the home of the Goodale sisters, who interpreted the glory of forest and stream and sky in their verse.

From the top of the Dome to **Monument Mountain**, ten miles away, seems only a step in the clear air of this region. William Cullen Bryant has immortalized the picturesque rocks,

“Shaggy and wild
With mossy trees and pinnacles of flint
And many a hanging crag.”



and has written how

“Sheer to the vale go down the bare old cliffs—
Huge pillars, that in the middle Heaven uprear
Their weather beaten capitals:”

in his poem called “Monument Mountain”. This traditional Indian place of punishment, down whose cliff evil doers who merited death among the Stockbridge tribe were obliged to cast themselves, became a place of honor



through the deed of an Indian maiden, who, loving contrary to the laws of her tribe and sorrowing unto death, threw herself from the cliff.

“And o’er the mound that covered her, the tribe
Built up a simple monument, a cone
Of small loose stone. Thenceforward all who passed,
Hunter and dame and virgin laid a stone
In silence on the pile. It stands there yet.
The mountain where the hapless maiden died
Is called the Mountain of the Monument.”

Tradition gives a different version to the story. The maiden pushed from the cliff by





her enraged fellows, was caught in the branches of a pine tree and hung suspended in mid-air for two days and nights. Finally the great spirit, to relieve her suffering or to rebuke her foes, sent a great thunder storm, striking the tree with a bolt of lightning and carried off into the clouds both tree and maiden, of whom no trace was ever found.

Three memorials of the early colonial struggle against the Indian on the one side, and political tyranny on the other, are found in this part of the county.



A bowlder erected at the old **Indian fordway** across the Housatonic at Great Barrington, indicates the place where Connecticut men met and defeated a band of Pequot Indians in August 1676. These Pequots were migrating to a new home, after their defeat in the East, and this battle turned them away from Berkshire and prevented further Indian complications in the County. The simple record on the stone reads "The site of the great wigwam where Major John Talcott overtook and dispersed a party of Indians, August 1676".

On the Village green near the old court house occurred the first armed resistance to the dominion of George III. On August 16, 1774, more than eight months before the Battle of Lexington, the judges of the Crown, who attempted to hold court here, were prevented from so doing by an armed mob



and Judge Ingersoll, who was especially hated by the Patriots, was ridden out of town by the angry citizens. An inscription on the **bowlder** notes that

“Near this spot stood the first court house of Berkshire County. Here occurred the first open resistance to British rule in America”.

South of the town near the road to Sheffield, a monument stands on another battlefield, commemorating the end of an uprising against the oppression of government by the colonists themselves. The followers of the unfortunate Daniel Shays, adopting wrong methods for the correction of the ills of Government, met their final defeat at the hands of Col. John Ashley and the Berkshire farmers on the plains of Sheffield, on the 27th of February 1787. This was the most important skirmish in **Shays' Rebellion** and with the downfall of its leaders, ended the attempt to reform the power of the Commonwealth by might, rather than by reason.





The home of the Stockbridge tribe of the Mohicans, granted them by the Indian Commissioners of Massachusetts, lay along the Northern borders of Monument mountain and in the town of Stockbridge, where a tall monolith of native stone at the end of the fine village street marks the old **Indian Burial Ground**. A **tower** with a splendid **chime of bells**, presented by the Field family, stands on the site of the church where the Indians and the Whites worshipped God together, under the leadership of Rev. John Sergeant to 1751,



and then of Jonathan Edwards till 1785 when this special mission work was ended. The tablet on the tower makes clear the dominant thought of the Puritan in his search for Religious freedom, that such freedom involved also service to his fellow man. The inscription reads "This memorial tower marks the spot where stood the little church in the wilderness in which John Sergeant preached to the Stockbridge Indians in 1739." The contrast between the lowly





Indian in the pew and the intellectual giant of his day, Edwards, in the pulpit marks the strangeness of the early life of the Colonists of Berkshire. Equally notable in the annals of Stockbridge life are the Field family, all of whom attained prominence in the life of the Nation. David Dudley was one of the most noted jurists of his day, Henry M. was a distinguished editor and Cyrus W. secured permanent fame as the successful layer of the first Atlantic cable. The Sedgwick family also brought honor to Stockbridge, of whom Catherine,



born in 1786, helped by her pen to make it known as the home of culture and of literary merit, as well as of Missionary zeal for the Indian. The **village street**, famed for its beauty, with its wide stretchers of green lawn, its rows of stately elms and its fine homes reminds one also that the early Fathers, notwithstanding the hardships of their daily lives, recognized and loved the beauty of the natural surroundings amid which their modest lot was cast.





Nestled amid the hills of Stockbridge near the Lenox border, lies the loveliest of the seventy lakes of Berkshire, Lake Mahkeenac, "the Great Water", familiarly called **Stockbridge Bowl**. Whether you gaze upon its shimmering waters from the lofty height of Andrew Carnegie's home, "Shadow Brook", or view it from the fine row of birches on its eastern edge, its surface reflects the passing clouds, or the lofty trees on its banks like a polished mirror. On its Northern border once stood a little red house, the summer home of Nathaniel Hawthorne, where he wrote the "House of the Seven Gables" and the "Blythedale Romance" and where the charm and beauty of the quiet lake and the glory of the forest and the sky gave inspiration to his mind and helped him to weave those wonder books of romance. Nowhere could poet or artist find finer opportunity for the imagination.





Nowhere has nature done more to charm the eye than at this very spot where forest and water, field and sky seem to meet in one ideal picture.

These pictures show the stretch of the bowl, looking southward toward Monument mountain, with a glimpse of the Dome rising to the far south. The sloping fields reaching down to the quiet waters and the peaceful cows belong to the estate of the late George W. Higginson, the fine estate of Andrew Carnegie stretches to the right and the scene is one which Hawthorne daily gazed upon from his study window nearby. The hand of man has also done much to complete the picture and well kept estates and beautiful homes in Stockbridge and in Lenox as well as throughout the county, pay tribute to man's appreciation of nature's handiwork and his joy in her friendship.





The sturdy revolutionary spirit that actuated the pioneers of the Berkshire Hills is illustrated in the life of General **John Patterson**, whose **monument** stands in the Lenox square. It is said of him that he was the first to join and among the last to return from the Continental army. He organized a regiment of Berkshire soldiers which marched eastward after Bunker Hill and rendered service in the siege of Boston. He was in the ill fated expedition into Canada with Montgomery and Arnold. He was a member of the



Court Martial which tried Major Andre, and, as a General, took part in the council of war called by General Washington, on the eve of the Battle of Monmouth.

Though Berkshire was remote from the actual scenes of warfare, its men did their full part as patriots in the struggle for freedom. The Battle of Bennington and the capture of Fort Ticonderoga bear witness to the prowess of Col. Easton and of "Fighting Parson Allen" of Pittsfield, and the rank and file of



Berkshire's Sons, though unknown to fame, were heroic in their devotion to the cause. This fine spirit of the early settlers is shown in the naming of the townships, Lee, Washington, Adams, Hancock and Otis, recalling the names of Revolutionary heroes, while noted English Statesmen, William Pitt and the Duke of Lenox and Richmond have their names perpetuated in the city of Pittsfield, and the adjoining towns of Richmond and Lenox.

From the beautiful estates of this latter town a drive of six miles along the State road, past the old Colonial church on the hill and the modern innovation of the Hotel Aspinwall, brings the traveler to his first outlook on the City of Pittsfield. If time allows, a short drive to the top of South Mountain, or better still, a walk to the summit will well repay him for his efforts. Still the wonderful panorama from the road at the top of Snake Hill with Greylock, the highest peak in the state, towering in the distance and the old home of Elsie Venner in the foreground, now the property of the **Pittsfield Country Club**, both charms the eye and brings to mind the fact that Doctor Oliver Wendell Holmes spent some summers here and gave a local setting to his story of Elsie Venner. This house was built by Mr. Henry Van-Schaaek in 1781 and was for many years the finest mansion in the village.

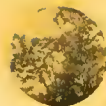




One catches a glimpse from this height of Melville Lake or Lilly Bowl, and nearby the former home of Herman Melville, in which he wrote his romances of the sea and many of his essays and sketches. He called his home "Arrowhead" and many a stone relic of the Indian days has been picked up in the soil of his broad acres, for near by were the Canoe meadows, or great camping ground of the Mohegans. A knoll near the river marks the Indian burial place and the Stockbridge tribe were accustomed to make pious pilgrimages to this spot leaving their birch canoes in the meadows near by, which thus received the name.

Nor must the memory of Henry W. Longfellow and his relation to Pittsfield be forgotten. Here Longfellow married Miss Appleton from her father's fine **home on East Street**, where the tall poplar trees cast their shadows and where "The Old Clock on the Stairs" told the passing hours. The poplar trees are gone, but the old clock is treasured as a sacred relic in the fine museum of Natural History and Art, located on South Street. This museum with its notable collection is a gift to the city by the late Hon. Zenas Crane. Even in that time the broad streets, the graceful overhanging elms and the wide stretches of lawn gave a charm to the village, which has not been lost in its later growth.





The park in its very center, surrounded by the public buildings and churches of the city, is still a thing of beauty and speaks eloquently of the quality of the citizenship. Education and the law are marked by the County Court house and the Public library in the left foreground, while citizenship and religion show in the right foreground in the old fashioned City Hall, the old First Church and St. Stephen's Church. In the center of the Park, where the first Cattle Show was held and the first Agricultural fair was organized in the State of Massachusetts stands a Sun Dial erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution to mark the site of the old elm of historic fame. A graceful monument erected by grateful citizens to the soldiers who went from the town to engage in the Civil War stands at the West side of the Park and a boulder on the east side commemorates the valiant



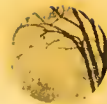


services of General Henry S. Briggs, the son of Governor Briggs who led the Pittsfield troops in the civil war and took part in twenty battles.

No wonder that the Indian loved this beautiful valley and found here his happy hunting ground. Pittsfield began its history as Poontoosuck, "The haunt of the winter deer" and **Pontoosuc Lake**, amid the "Forest Hills" on either side retains the Indian name and marks the northern border of the town. It is matched by **Onota Lake** to the west of the city, a favorite hunting place of the Indians, with its tradition of the sacred white deer whose death would bring misfortune to the tribe, and its fort or block house built for defence against the Indians in 1756. This was called Fort Ashley from the

owner of the hill on which it was located, who was afterward a noted Tory, and it was used in connection with Fort Massachusetts in Williamstown for the protection of the county. From either lake can





be seen to the north a dome like hill its crown shaven like a monk's with a gnarled and rugged oak on its top. It stands like a memorial to one of Lanesboro's most eminent citizens of the olden days.

Jonathan Smith, a plain level headed farmer was a member of the state convention of Massachusetts in 1788, called to ratify the Constitution of the United States. The eyes of the country were on Massachusetts at this time as the hopes of this league of States depended on her leadership and vote. The simple practical address of Jonathan Smith to his fellow members in favor of the Constitution won the day and Massachusetts was the sixth state to ratify the Union. Smith's constituents honored him by naming this dome on his property "Constitution Hill" and more recent generations have erected a **boulder** in the town square, commemorating his fine service.

Lanesboro was also the home of other distinguished citizens of Massachusetts. George N. Briggs, the first President of the Berkshire Life Insurance Company, six times elected to Congress and seven times chosen Governor of Massachusetts, was born in Adams in 1796 but came in early life to Lanesboro and began here his honorable career. His first office was that of town clerk and he was as faithful in his service to the town



as he was later in his wider duties to the Commonwealth. In these days Lanesboro was known not only for the charm of its hills, its lakes and vales, but also for the sturdy character of its men.

In the village cemetery stands a low native **boulder** with a simple inscription marking the last resting place of Henry W. Shaw, known to the world by his humorous writings as **Josh Billings**. His father was an eminent lawyer, and the son, by his quaint sayings, the odd spelling of his mother tongue and his common sense philosophy, made a name for himself in literature. The old Shaw homestead still stands in the village street and the remains of its honored son rest in the quiet cemetery.



From literature to cheese is a long step, but the adjoining town of Cheshire gained more renown from the latter than Lanesboro did from the former. Elder John Leland was a staunch friend of Thomas Jefferson, and came mightily to his defence when he was nominated for President. In honor of his election the citizens of Cheshire, under the leadership of Elder Leland, made a great cheese, weighing 1235 pounds, which was carefully cured for two months, and then hauled by team to Hudson, N. Y., and shipped to Washington as a present



to Jefferson. Elder Leland presented it to the President on Jan. 1, 1802 with great ceremony, and brought back to his constituents the thanks of Jefferson for their gift, as an evidence of their fidelity to the great cause of equal rights to all men.

Tradition does not ascribe the source of **Cheshire's fine Reservoir** to the whey which flowed from the cheese press, but its beauty when viewed from the neighboring hillsides makes both literature and cheese seem unnecessary and tame. Its waters flow northward into the Hoosac river which finds its way to tide water through the majestic Hudson, while the gentle brook which comes from the hillsides a few miles to the south, turns its course southward into the Housatonic and on through the county and through western Connecticut into Long Island Sound. That the tired traveler might slake his thirst a fountain was erected in the village square by Mrs. Mary S. Lockwood, Chaplain General of the Daughters of the American Revolution in memory of the brave men who served in the Revolutionary war. Patriots of Cheshire answered the call of Lexington and Concord, and were at the capture of Ticonderoga and the Battle of Bennington.



The most charming spot in the county, Williamstown, at the northwest corner of the state, with its fine array of College Buildings, its Gothic Chapel and tower, its college campus and its **Haystack Monument**, commemorating the birth of American Missions, has a wealth of historical and literary interest which would repay a long delay within its borders. The band of young Williams students who, in the year 1806 under the leadership of Samuel J. Mills, took refuge from the storm under a neighboring haystack and who there devoted

their lives to the cause of uplifting the benighted people of China little realized the mighty force which they were starting for the conversion of the human race. The American Board of Commissioners for foreign missions owes its origin to the courage and devotion of these students. Its beautiful purple hills, with Greylock in the very center of the group, make it an ideal type of nature's best handiwork, and the late Dr. McCosh of Princeton University declared with all reverence that it would be the ideal place to hold the Judgment day, because the surrounding hills furnished the proper amphitheatre for assembling the hosts of Earth and of Heaven. No visit to the county is complete without a glimpse of this fine college town, and the traveler from the west or south should pass this way on his road to the Mohawk trail at North Adams, five miles away.





THE old Indian trail of the Iroquois Federation led along the lowlands of the Mohawk and Hoosac rivers, through Eastern New York and Southern Vermont into Massachusetts, and then boldly climbed the height of Hoosac mountain and dropped down into the Deerfield valley 2,000 feet below. It is one of the oldest highways on the continent. It takes its name from the Mohawk tribe, the strongest in the Indian Federation, and its rugged heights, its bold outlines of mountain peaks and forests and its long vistas down the winding streams below make its name most appropriate. Along this trail came the early English pioneers to found a home for themselves in the Berkshire valleys. Then followed the stage coach, and the railroad, and now the descendants of these early settlers, in luxurious motor cars, enjoy the beauty of the trail and wonder at the courage of its heroic makers.

Starting at North Adams, the length of the mountain trail to Charlemont on the east is 15.72 miles. The grade is not over 7.5% at its steepest point, and the height at Whitcomb summit is 2272 feet above sea level. The building of the trail was undertaken by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in September 1912, and completed in November 1914, at a cost of approximately \$345,000.

In charm of outlook, in the diversity of field and forest, stream and mountain peak, and in the glimpse of winding river and shaded valley, the trail is unsurpassed among New England's scenic joys.





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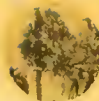




AMID these beautiful surroundings and partaking somewhat of their characteristics the Berkshire Life Insurance Company of Pittsfield has set its roots deep into the life of the community as one of its old established institutions. It commenced business in 1851 and is thus one of the older companies of its kind. Its first President was Governor George N. Briggs and its officers and directors have always been men of fine character and prominent in the work of the county. While it is conservative in its management, its policies are issued in a variety of forms suited to all conditions of life, and subject to all the liberal provisions under Massachusetts laws.

Mr. William D. Wyman, who has served the company for over thirty years, both as General Agent in the field and in the Executive work of the home office, is President of the Company.

For further information apply at the Home Office or at any of the agency offices.





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